

Contributions.

LAYING ON OF HANDS.

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In *The Christian Herald*, June 30, page 510, first column, under the heading of "Questions and Answers," I find the following in relation to "Laying on of Hands."

"A. B. F., San Diego, Calif. Has any one in these days authority to do as Peter and John did (Acts 8:17) in Samaria? Can the Holy Spirit be imparted by the laying on of hands?"

It cannot. God will give the Holy Spirit to those that ask him (Luke 11:13) and there is no need for any one to lay on hands, and no good can come of it. People who expect to receive the Holy Spirit by having any other person's hands laid on their heads, will be disappointed. Pray for yourself and ask the prayers of others for you, but do not be deceived by the notion that a particle of good can come to you through any person laying his hands on your head. There is no rite or ceremony by which any man can impart spiritual blessing through physical contact."

The foregoing questions are important, and I think I know why they were asked; and the answer is also important, but I confess that I do not understand why it was given as it stands. There are two questions, and in the answer the first is somewhat shrouded or overlooked; and, as I view it, justice is not fully done to the second.

It is true that the gift of the Holy Spirit is "the gift of God," and that it is given in answer to prayer to the person whose heart is right in the sight of God. If the heart be right, other conditions will be right; but if the "heart is not right in the sight of God," all prayer that can be offered by the candidate or others will be in vain. It is the privilege and duty of every believer in Jesus and child of God to pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit for himself or herself; and, no doubt, if the conditions are right, the prayer will be answered and God will bestow the gift; but this is no reason, and there can be no reason, why we may not pray for others "that they might receive the Holy Ghost," just as Peter and John did for these believers in Samaria. In the case before us what did Simon want? Did he want the Holy Spirit for and in himself? Not at all; "he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost." It is this power that is here called "the gift of God." In this Simon had "neither part nor lot;" and the only reason why he did not, as Peter put it, was, "for thy

heart is not right in the sight of God." His error was in thinking that this power could "be purchased with money" (v 20.) He was "in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." It was not wrong for him to have this desire, but it was wrong in him to think that this power could be purchased; and this only betrayed his ignorance—his want of the true light. Peter did not stop with this exposition and censure, but he earnestly admonished him, saying, "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art yet in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." He did not reprove or censure him for having a desire for this power—this "gift of God;" but he did want him to receive the true light and to experience the necessary change of heart and life. He did not intimate to him that it was wrong for him to desire all the power that they had and exercised, nor that none but apostles can have it, but he did want him to understand and know and feel and manifest that it was not a common, secular, financial affair, but a matter of grace, a gift of God, spiritual, divine. So Simon understood them and he was desirous to be corrected. He, no doubt, repented and prayed for himself, but he also said to them, "Pray ye the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me." I believe that they did pray for him, and that he prayed for himself, and that the Lord heard and answered their prayers as fully as he was prepared to receive the gift, for "of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."

The laying on of hands was not only practiced by the apostles but it was enjoined upon others for observance according to the will of God. It was observed under different circumstances and, no doubt, for somewhat different purposes, but it was always important and had a good effect when it was properly observed and received. In the sixth chapter of Acts we have an account of the choosing of "seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom," to serve as deacons, to see to it that certain persons were not "neglected in the daily ministration." When these were chosen, although they had already received and were "full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom," they were "set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid *their* hands on them." Here the laying on of hands was "in token of seeking for them the divine blessing and guidance and consecrating them to their work;" and it no doubt had the ef-

fect of impressing on their minds and hearts the importance of their calling and upon the entire congregation the importance of the appointment. It is a mistake to think that no good could come from this laying on of hands because these men had already received the gift of and were full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom. This solemn service was significant and had a good effect on all concerned.

In the ninth chapter of Acts we have a historical statement of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. "The Lord in a vision" appeared to Ananias and said to him in reference to Saul, "behold, he prayeth, and hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him that he might receive his sight." Being fully instructed and feeling his duty and responsibility, "Ananias went his way and entered into the house; and putting his hand on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, *even* Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales; and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized." This Saul, being convicted and very penitent, prayed very earnestly and sincerely for himself. The Lord heard him and answered his prayer. But in showing him what he must do and what would be done for him, we see the laying on of the hand of Ananias. And in directing Ananias the Lord includes the laying on of hands. Ananias was not an apostle but a faithful disciple and chosen minister. According to his appointment he observed the laying on of hands, and God bestowed the blessing. This was a gift of God and it might have been bestowed in answer to Saul's prayer without any human agency; but God in his wisdom saw fit to order it as he did, and it was becoming a duty in both Ananias and Saul to submit to and observe the divine arrangement and appointment. By noticing this account carefully it will be seen that Saul had experienced a change in his belief, his heart and in life. He was sincere and in great earnest. He was fasting and praying and hopefully waiting for special blessings. He did not suggest to the Lord that it was useless to defer this matter until the coming of Ananias, and that, as restoring sight must be a gift of God and salvation is by grace, therefore it is not necessary to wait for the laying on of the hand of a man and for baptism. And Ananias, although he expressed some fears and wonder, did not intimate that he thought it would be useless for him to lay hands on this persecutor, that there was no healing virtue in the human touch, that he could be filled